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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 009627

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2016

TAGS: PREL PHUM KDEM RS

SUBJECT: RUSSIAN DUMA CHAIRPERSON KOSACHEV ON US, IRAN,
LEBANON, CIS, NGOS, INTERNAL POLITICS

Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns: Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶11. (C) Summary: In an August 31 meeting with the Ambassador, Chairman of the International Relations Committee of the Russia Duma Konstantin Kosachev expressed concern over the deteriorating tone in US-Russian relations. Kosachev explained his opposition to imposing sanctions against Iran absent a clear roadmap, arguing that Iran was emboldened by Lebanon and undeterred by economic measures. Kosachev still held out the possibility of a Russian troop contribution to UNIFIL, but conceded Ministry of Defense opposition. Surveying the frozen conflicts, Kosachev recognized that Russia was not playing a helpful role, but argued the West did not recognize the legitimate grievances that undergird the disputes, which independence for Kosovo would complicate.

Kosachev welcomed the Ambassador's state-of-play on NGO re-registration and volunteered his assistance, if required. He characterized news of a union of leftist political parties a welcome political development in Russia, but said it was an open question whether this union or a combination of the beleaguered "rightist" democrats could break through the seven percent parliamentary threshold. Action: Request Department's assistance in helping Kosachev schedule appointments in Washington on September 24-25 and in New York on September 27. Other topics septel. End Summary

TONE OF US-RUSSIAN RELATIONS: LUGAR COMMENTS

¶12. (C) Kosachev launched the hour-long meeting expressing surprise over Senator Lugar's August 29 characterization of US-Russian relations as "adversarial" (which, rendered in Russian, conveyed the sense of "enemy"). The Ambassador responded that the Senator's remarks were an accurate sign of the times, reflecting the assessment in Washington that Russian actions were tilting the relationship to one of competition, not cooperation. Factors that may have hardened the Senator's view, the Ambassador added, was the GOR refusal to permit a visit to the Mayak fissile material storage facility that precipitated the cancellation of Lugar's July visit, following on last year's six-hour delay of Senators Lugar and Obama at the Perm airport. Having just completed a visit to Georgia and Azerbaijan, Senator Lugar was well-apprised of the concerns of Russia's neighbors. The Ambassador urged Kosachev to seek out Russia's critics during his late September visit to the U.S. and address their concerns directly. He also reviewed where WTO negotiations stood, and outlined initiatives flowing from the G-8 summit meeting between the Presidents to enhance cooperation on nuclear energy.

IRAN: QUESTIONING SANCTIONS AND THE END-GAME

¶ 13. (C) A critical factor in US-Russian relations would be continued cooperation in halting Iranian proliferation, the Ambassador emphasized. Kosachev noted that he was alarmed over more aggressive Iranian rhetoric, fueled by the perceived victory of its clients in Lebanon. Relating an August 30 conversation with the Iranian Ambassador, Kosachev concluded that Iran was pleased with events in Lebanon, convinced that they had inflicted a defeat on Israel and the West, and untroubled by the prospect of sanctions. The Iranian Ambassador had struck a defiant tone, he noted, stating that Iran was not intimidated by anyone, and certainly not by the UNSC. Despite "open relations" with the Iranian Ambassador, Kosachev was taken aback by the strident Iranian talking points, which the Ambassador appeared to read verbatim, as well as by Iran's criticism of Russia as well as U.S. positions. Kosachev condemned Iran's decision to move forward with the production of heavy water, labeling it "completely wrong," but concluded that the more pressure applied on Iran, the less influence the UNSC would wield. "If we proceed toward sanctions," Kosachev warned, "they will have an opposite effect."

¶ 14. (C) Kosachev stated that the GOR was still studying the Iranian response, which he described as difficult to understand, technical in its details, and requiring clarification. Based on his conversations with the relevant GOR actors, Kosachev predicted that the GOR would seek further dialogue with Iran and put forward additional questions before arriving at a final decision. Pointing to uncertainty in European capitals as well, Kosachev concluded that few countries would be prepared to proceed immediately. Kosachev reinforced his discomfort over starting down the sanctions path without a clear roadmap. The international community would box itself in a corner by applying economic

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sanctions, knowing that they would be rejected by Iran. The Iranian leadership, he reiterated, was not posturing and was not intimidated by sanctions. Kosachev related that when he raised the examples of Spain, Sweden and the Ukraine -- countries that had nuclear programs, but no enrichment facilities -- the Iranian Ambassador retorted that none of these countries had been "cheated" by the international community; instead, Iran had to rely upon itself.

¶ 15. (C) The Ambassador warned that inaction or delay in the UNSC carried a significant cost. Iran had demonstrated that international conciliation would not induce it to halt its nuclear program. The US and Russia, working with the EU, had produced a very generous package and had agreed several months ago that Iranian rejection of its terms would be met with significant steps to demonstrate the displeasure of the international community. While Kosachev's apprehensions were understandable, no one was in a position to describe exactly the consequences of continued Iranian defiance. However, it was important for the GOR to acknowledge the cost of international inaction. The Ambassador agreed that events in Lebanon appeared to have hardened Iranian attitudes. It was critical that the EU-3, US, Russia and China remain united. Russia should not signal that it intended to throw up its arms. US policymakers were aware of the limits of sanctions and no one sought a precipitous move to the use of force; however, the US was convinced that inaction was not an option. The six partners needed to think through the next steps together and ensure that Iran did not have an opportunity to exploit differences.

LEBANON AFTERMATH; RUSSIAN UNIFIL DELIBERATIONS

¶ 16. (C) Kosachev described the Israeli-Lebanon conflict as a lose-lose proposition. The UNSC, Russia, the US and EU all were diminished, he argued, and the only answer was to prevent a resumption of hostilities. Kosachev questioned the

perceived unconditional US support for Israel, arguing that the GOI had abused its sovereign right to combat terrorists. He noted that he was an advocate for Russian participation in UNIFIL, but conceded that the Russian bureaucracy was divided. Much would depend on the mandate, with the Ministry of Defense arguing against a troop contribution in the absence of clarity over the scope of UNIFIL's mission. Technically, Kosachev underscored, the GOR had a 2,000 strong division prepositioned for peacekeeping operations. Foreign Minister Lavrov's trip to the region (September 6-8) and discussions at UNGA would shape Russian thinking. The Ambassador agreed that the expanded UNIFIL needed to be stood up as quickly as possible, warning that provocations by Hezbollah or Syria against a politically weakened GOI would create an explosive situation.

FROZEN CONFLICTS: NO EASY ANSWERS, KOSOVO COMPLICATES

¶7. (C) Kosachev bemoaned Western indifference to the real emotions that fueled the frozen conflicts. There was some truth that Russia perpetuated these conflicts, he admitted, but the key to resolving the disputes in Georgia lay in improving relations between the GOG and people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Abkhazia, Kosachev stressed, had never been an historic part of Georgia, but was incorporated by Stalin and Beria -- a move that had been rejected by the Abkhazians from the outset. Kosachev said that he personally was in favor of Abkhazia remaining within Georgia, but not by force, and repeated that this outcome would not be achieved by Georgian appeals to the US or Brussels, or by Russian pressure: a concordat between Tbilisi and Abkhazia was essential. There needed to be a common program. Russia had not done enough to effect this outcome, but neither -- he insisted -- had Georgia. As for South Ossetia, it was an instance of a divided people. The issue resonated in Russia, he noted, and within the Duma and among the leadership of North Ossetia it was difficult to discuss any solution short of reunification. Kosachev derisively described the economy of South Ossetia as consisting of 2 factories, 600 jobs, and "you know what."

¶8. (C) Kosovo presented a very dangerous development since there would be a referendum in Transdnistria on September 17. In the wake of the positive Putin-Voronin visit, he noted, Russia would neither recognize nor deny the referendum, but some Duma members would be present as observers. Kosachev said he simply could not accept that Kosovo was not a precedent for other frozen conflicts, including Abkhazia. If Kosovo was granted independence, the international community

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should do so understanding the implications for other conflict areas. These disputes, he reiterated, are driven by nationalist demands that are not artificial. While Kosachev accepted the Ambassador's points on the unique status of Kosovo, he reiterated that they were not credible to the people of these regions.

NGOS

¶9. (C) The Ambassador briefed Kosachev on the status of the re-registration of Western non-governmental organizations and his meeting with the Director of the Federal Registration Service (septel), noting the high level of anxiety among NGO representatives over the implementation of the new law. Kosachev, who played a helpful role in securing the modification of the initial draft of the NGO legislation, immediately interjected that he was prepared to help, if there was any indication that the law was being misapplied. The goal, he underscored, was to ease the work of the NGOs. Kosachev agreed with the Ambassador's suggestion that the GOR take the initiative in briefing G8 Ambassadors and members of

the foreign NGO community.

POLITICAL CONSOLIDATIONS

¶110. (C) Turning to internal political developments, Kosachev welcomed the recent announcement of a union of leftist political parties. A lack of strong political parties was a signal weakness of Russia's democracy and United Russia had long advocated and created incentives for political combinations. Some reforms that had been interpreted in the West as undemocratic, Kosachev noted, were sincere efforts to create larger, more stable political parties. Kosachev said that Russia needed a strong rightist party as well, and hoped Yabloko and SPS would overcome their leadership differences to forge a coalition.

¶111. (C) Kosachev said he was not certain that the leftist union of the Party of Life, Party of Pensioners and Rodina would succeed, pointing to the charisma-deficit of its leadership; nevertheless, he wished the organizers success. United Russia, he underscored, would not do anything to block this political development. Kosachev predicted a 2007 Duma with United Russia, Communist, and LDPR representation. Both the leftist bloc and coalition of rightists parties could aspire to break through the seven percent threshold but, slamming his fist on the table, Kosachev expressed exasperation over whether the latter would get their act together. As to whether the Kremlin would induce a coalition among the beleaguered "democrats," Kosachev said it depended on the coalition's leader. Former Prime Minister Kasyanov, for instance, was not welcome at the Kremlin and Kosachev discounted his strategy of running for President absent a strong political base.

ACTION REQUEST: WASHINGTON/NEW YORK MEETINGS

¶112. (U) Post requests Department assistance in helping the Russian Embassy to arrange appropriate calls for Kosachev during his September 24-25 visit to Washington and September 27 stop in New York. In addition to his already-arranged session with the HIRC leadership, Kosachev seeks appointments with Senators Lugar and McCain, a meeting with the National Security Adviser, and meetings with appropriate senior State Department officials. Kosachev would also be willing to speak at the Council of Foreign Relations in New York.

BURNS